

Gene and Lyn Overholt Endowment

Bergein F. Overholt, MD, was born in Battle Creek, Michigan and moved to Knoxville, TN at age 2. Lyn Overholt (née Shafer) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. Both Gene and Lyn were raised in Knoxville. They grew up a few blocks from each other and met for the first time at the tender age of 3. They became high school sweethearts and, 18 years after their first encounter, they married in 1958.

Dr. Overholt received his medical degree from the University of Tennessee. He completed his internal medicine residency and gastroenterology fellowship at the University of Michigan (with Marvin Pollard, MD) before pursuing two additional years of GI training at New York Hospital, Cornell Medical Center, New York (with Marvin Sleisenger, MD).

In 1961, Dr. Overholt began his pioneering work on flexible lower endoscopy at the University of Michigan, resulting in his performance of the first flexible sigmoidoscopy in 1963. For this groundbreaking work, he received ASGE's highest recognition in 1975, the Schindler Award, making him the youngest recipient of this award to date. He received the American Medical Association's highest honor, the William Beaumont Award, in 1986.

After completing his training, Dr. Overholt returned to his hometown of Knoxville and founded Gastrointestinal Associates of Knoxville in 1971, leading this group for four decades to its current status as one of the premiere GI groups in the country. In 1986, his efforts resulted in the establishment of the nation's first GI single specialty, state-licensed, Medicare-certified Ambulatory Surgery Center, thereby creating a new paradigm for the provision of cost-efficient ambulatory GI care and cancer screening services. Dr. Overholt and his colleagues subsequently taught many of today's GI practice leaders how to develop and manage their own GI-ASCs.

While providing GI care in a community setting, Dr. Overholt continued to pursue cutting-edge clinical research. As Medical Director of the Laser Center of the Thompson Cancer Survival Center from 1986 until 2011, he directed a broad clinical and basic research program that began with the development of photodynamic therapy (PDT) and laser-induced fluorescence of benign and malignant esophageal tissue. His work with endoscopic PDT provided the foundation for today's endoscopic therapies of Barrett's esophagus and early esophageal cancer.

Dr. Overholt has served in many regional and national leadership roles. He was President of the Tennessee Society of Internal Medicine from 1982-84. He served on the board of the American Society of Internal Medicine from 1984-87 and from 1988-90. He served on ASGE's Governing Board from 1972-77 and again from 1979-86, including as ASGE President from 1983-84. He was President of the American Association of Ambulatory Surgery Centers (AAASC) from 1995-98. Dr. Overholt is a Fellow of the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy and a Master of the American College of Gastroenterology.

Gene and Lyn have been extremely active in their community, particularly in the field of education, serving on the Knoxville City School Board, the local Chamber of Commerce, and in many other local and regional organizations. They are the recipients of numerous civic awards. Lyn established the "Rule High School Preschool Parenting Learning Center" which received state and national recognition of excellence.

In 2017, Lyn and Gene celebrated their 80th birthdays in the midst of their loved ones, children Scott (and wife Teresa), and Suzanne (and husband Grant) and their 6 grandchildren. They will be celebrating their 58th wedding anniversary later that same year! In their spare time, Gene and Lyn enjoy traveling, tending to their garden, their bees and chickens at their home in Knoxville, "snowbirding" to Florida in the winter and spending time with friends and family.